

Pastoral Letter – East Anglia District

Chair of the District - Revd. Julian M. Pursehouse

November 2020

Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

I am writing this letter at the close of All Saints Day; a day when we remember that the Church is not simply the congregation of the faithful gathered in the present moment but the also the great congregation of the faithful who have gone before us and rest in the eternity of God. The writer of Hebrews refers to *the great cloud of witnesses* (chapter 12) that surrounds us and becomes a source of encouragement and intercession for the church on earth, as we seek to be faithful disciples in the here and now. It is a reminder to us all that there are ordinary saints who have gone before us in time and space, wrestled with *the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune* and yet remained steadfast in their faith and devotion, *looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith*.

The writing of this letter also coincides with the recent announcement of a second national lockdown that will begin at midnight on Thursday 5th. November and once again we have to embrace the harsh reality of the ceasing of public worship; at least for a month. I know this will come as a blow to many folk across the District and many of you will be left feeling frustrated, bewildered and bereft. I am well aware, because of my own travels across the District, just how hard local stewards have worked to complete risk assessments and make our buildings COVID secure. I thank you for this work and assure you that it is not wasted – everything is in place for when we might be permitted to return to gathered public worship! During the first lockdown many churches and circuits found innovative ways in which to migrate our activity to other platforms and media – again this creativity is not wasted but once more will come into its own as we seek to remain connected, cared for and worshipful as God's people.

I mentioned in my last letter how helpful I have found the voice of poetry during this national crisis – it has often been a source of hope, inspiration and consolation. So again, I leave you this month with a poem by Susan Coolidge, entitled *New Every Morning*. In this poem there is a sober recognition that sometimes we encounter difficult things and life can be hard – and it may continue to be so. However, alongside this realisation is the '*glad refrain*' of the dawning of a new day with all the possibilities that it may behold and an understated optimism of grasping the gift of that new horizon. I wonder whether one of the challenges of being one of the saints of God is to navigate this very tension and to do so with faith, hope and love?

Here is the poem in full – enjoy!

*Every day is a fresh beginning;
Listen, my soul, to the glad refrain,
And, spite of old sorrow and older sinning,
And puzzles forecasted and possible pain,
Take heart with the day, and begin again.*

Peace and Blessing, Julian